Isaac on sidelines in drive to revise Amendment 2

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By **Rich Laden**
Gazette Telegraph

Colorado Springs Mayor Robert Isaac, arguably the city's most widely known and influential politician, says he won't join the drive to revise Amendment 2 because it's not his job to play peacemaker on controversial issues.

"You can't solve all the problems," he said. "There's just no way without people having to give up some of their opinions, and they won't do it. . . . I don't see how you can lead a way out of it."

In an interview with Gazette Telegraph editors and reporters Wednesday, Isaac said he declined an invitation to join business people and civic leaders who this week endorsed a campaign to replace Amendment 2.

The 65-year-old Isaac, mayor since 1979, said he voted for Amendment 2, which bans laws protecting gays from discrimination based on sexual orientation.

The amendment's approval Nov. 3 by Colorado voters has sparked calls for travel and economic boycotts of the state. The nation's mayors, scheduled to meet in Colorado Springs in June, moved their convention to New York City in protest.

A new Colorado Springs group, Come Together Colorado, hopes to put a ballot initiative before voters in November that would strike a middle ground. It would replace Amendment 2 with a measure that would outlaw discrimination against gays and lesbians, yet forbid preferential treatment for them.

"If the people want to change that, fine," Isaac said. "I can't stop the divisiveness.

"What am I going to say? Do I say to the public, 'You really made a mistake on your vote. You made a mistake on all your votes. We ought to just get rid of the vote.' The people voted for this. I think they knew what they were talking about."

> "I think they (voters) knew what they were talking about."
>
> **Mayor Robert Isaac**

■ Another city bans travel to Colorado/**B2**

On simmering social issues, Isaac said, he would get involved only if something comes before the City Council. In 1991, the council rejected a gay rights measure recommended by an advisory panel.

"To go out on the abortion issue, that's not my position. To go out on this issue, to try to bring people together on either side of the gay and lesbian issue, I wouldn't know how to do it."

He dismissed as speculation the fears of some business people that Amendment 2 is hurting efforts to entice new employers to town. Only a couple of companies being recruited have mentioned Amendment 2, Isaac said. In contrast, he says he's received hundreds of letters of support for Colorado Springs.

Local attorney Greg Walta, author of the revamped Amendment 2 measure, said elected officials like Isaac and Gov. Roy Romer risk offending both sides of Amendment 2 if they get involved.

"The elected leadership of the state is paralyzed, and it's hard to criticize them for being paralyzed," Walta said. "I think he's right. Only someone who's not elected can take charge of this."

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raised an average of the 1980 figure of $77,000. By comparison, challengers raised an average $40,000 in PAC funds last year, down from $50,000 in 1980, the figures showed.

Nationwide, 1992 incumbents outspent their challengers by more than 3-to-1 and received nine times as much PAC money, according to the study.

The Colorado groups are among more than 200 citizen groups across the country that urged President Clinton to push a comprehensive reform package through Congress.

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"If they had addressed it and talked to us, we would never have filed a complaint."

parent Robert Thew

would make it difficult to control student behavior. "If the disciplining of children were to have the same standing as harassment, we'd have problems," he said.

Even the fact that Bustos had to appear in court, however, might make teachers think twice about taking a firm stand on discipline, Lawler said.

"Any time a colleague is removed from the classroom, it scares teachers. A message gets sent," said Lawler, who thinks harassment laws should be changed to take into account concerns about maintaining a safe school environment.

"Any time a teacher touches a child in a directive way, a child can take it as offensive," he said.

"That's not right. We shouldn't have to be afraid to teach," said Bustos, who frequently talks about diversity issues with her students. "You can't be effective if you are afraid."

In criminal cases such as Bustos', teachers also see that their school districts usually do not supply them with an attorney. That's because if the teacher is found guilty, the district lawyer's involvement could be seen as a sign of support for him, making the district more vulnerable in a later civil lawsuit, Lawler said.

But, he said, Bustos had to make an attempt to stand up for her black students' rights. "If she had remained silent, it would have been interpreted that she supported the comment. The community would have thought she was a bigot."

Despite the stress of her experience, Bustos does not seem to be gun-shy about getting involved in controversial situations in the future.

"To me, it is essential for learning at all levels that kids feel free and safe," she said.

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